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Ranking Journalism and Mass Communications Programs: Administrators and Faculty Approve of the Idea and Assess Potential Criteria

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Abstract

Rankings of universities and colleges are common and controversial. However, few rankers produce useful lists that assess and compare journalism and mass communications programs. The few currently available involve superficial reputational surveys or are less than transparent about their methodology. To determine potential criteria for a useful ranking, this article reports the results of a survey of administrators and educators in a broad cross-section of such programs. The survey finds broad support among respondents for the idea of ranking and, further, details criteria that respondents said they would find useful in developing a ranked list of programs.

Keywords: journalism school rankings, university rankings, educational institution rankings, Department of Education Ratings, evaluating journalism and mass communications programs

Introduction

Rankings of colleges and universities by magazines such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *Forbes*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, and *Washington Monthly* have been popular among parents and students since the early 1980s. They have also been decried for nearly as long by academic leaders who contend that education cannot be quantified and compared as the rankers seek to do. Even as they assess professional

schools, such as law, business, and medical schools, however, most such rankers have rarely considered journalism programs. They leave the field to a few surveyors who provide thinly sourced reputational lists or whose methodology is less than transparent. A 2015 list from *USA Today*, for example, relies on an outside surveyor for such information as pay levels among graduates without revealing such details as the number of alumni respondents in each program (Stockwell, 2015). Moreover, the pay data date back to 2013.

This omission of journalism and mass communications programs by most major ranking organizations comes at a time when the value of such programs, along with others in the humanities, is being questioned. Shrinkage in professional opportunities in media, particularly in newspapers, combined with funding pressures by legislatures and federal authorities and worries about the cost-effectiveness of higher education overall, make it especially important for students, parents, administrators, and faculty members to have access to solid comparative information about such programs. By seeing how they stack up against other programs, officials and faculty members can work to improve their programs, as was argued in an essay published in the *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (Weber, 2014) that called for such rankings to be developed and published.

Rankings have generated a great deal of heat among opponents, which the essay explored at length. The essay also examined the reasons why journalism programs are largely ignored by rankers. It urged the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) to lead the way to establish a ranking system, based on information provided by schools that would be useful to parents, students, faculty, and administrators interested in comparing programs.

This article follows up on that essay, reporting the results of a survey of journalism and mass communications program leaders and teachers conducted in the spring of 2014. The key finding is that by a substantial margin, the program leaders and teachers who responded believe it would be useful to rank such programs and to publish the rankings. Most of those responding, moreover, reacted favorably to criteria suggested for the rankings, including such measurable elements as the variety of programs schools offer, the internship opportunities students take, and the industry experience among faculty members.

Method and Results

Conducted by way of SurveyMonkey during April, May, and June 2014, the survey generated responses from administrators and teachers at a broad range of universities and colleges from across the country.¹ In all, 73 respondents completed the survey, answering nearly all the 39 questions.² The respondents had been solicited by email, using addresses in the AEJMC's Journalism and Mass Communication Directory and through the AEJMC's Facebook site and several association division sites on Facebook.

Fully three quarters of the respondents said they would find rankings to be *useful*, *highly useful*, or *essential* for students, parents, alumni, faculty, and administrators.

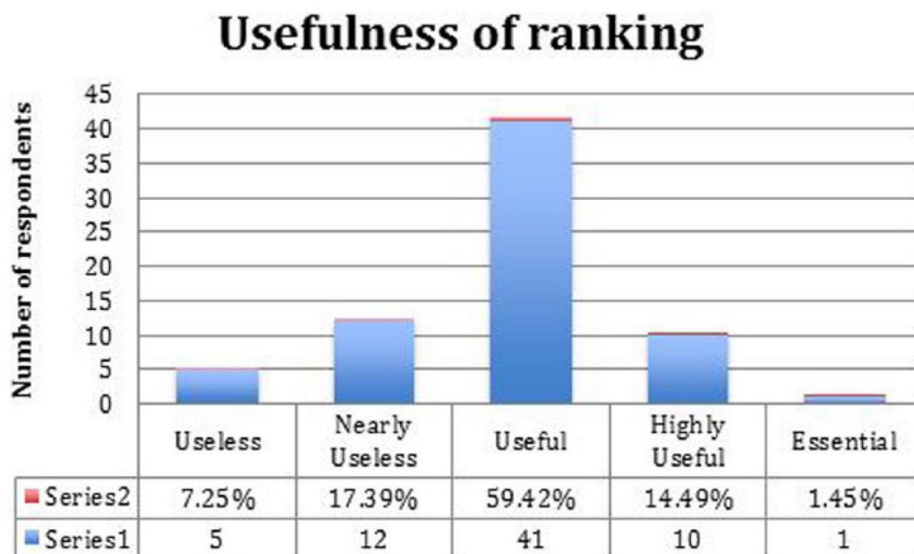


Figure 1. Numbers and percentages of 69 respondents answering the question: “How useful do you feel ranking journalism and mass communications programs on a combination of these criteria [listed in the survey] would be to constituencies including students, parents, alumni, faculty and administrators?” Series 1 reports the number of respondents offering the answer noted at the top of the boxes, while Series 2 reports the percentage of the total, 69, offering the answer.

(In all, 69 respondents answered a question on this point, with 17 judging the idea *useless* or *nearly useless*.) Furthermore, 79% (54 of 68 answering the question) said the rankings should be published every 3 years (36 respondents) or every 5 years (18 respondents). Only 14 said to never publish them. Results appear in Figures 1 and 2:

The responses suggest that there may be substantial support for the idea of ranking journalism and mass communications programs among a cross-section of those involved in delivering such programs. The survey respondents included 42 people who hold such leadership titles as dean, associate dean, director, department head, and chair. Others among the 73 who completed the survey included instructors, assistant professors, professors, and two graduate students.

As detailed at length in the essay published by the *Educator* (Weber, 2014), the idea of ranking colleges and universities is controversial. Critics argue it is a fool’s errand to compare widely dissimilar schools based on a handful of statistical measures and contend such rankings cannot take into account such intangibles as the personal chemistry between a student and a campus. A minority of respondents to this survey similarly found the idea of ranking journalism and mass communications programs repugnant. A respondent from a Southern university commented:

I find it ironic that we are considering ranking . . . at a time when more and more college presidents are decrying the *U.S. News* rankings . . . I would find such rankings

When should rankings be published?

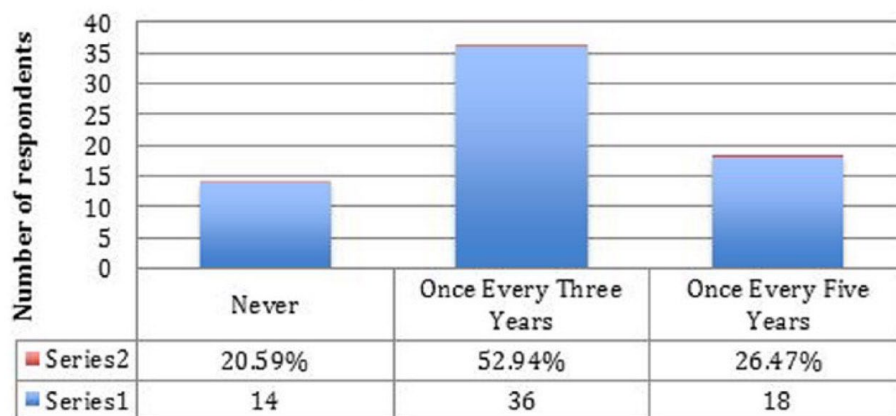


Figure 2. Numbers and percentages of 68 respondents completing the statement: “It would be useful to gather and publish such rankings” Series 1 reports the number of respondents offering the answer noted at the top of the boxes, while Series 2 reports the percentage of the total, 68, offering the answer.

useless . . . Sorry that I marked everything “useless,” but I don’t understand how I could mark some of the criteria useful when I find the entire idea of rankings despicable.

Rankings also unsettle educators who think it unhelpful to compare small programs with larger ones. One administrator from a Midwestern school chose not to complete the survey and explained in an email:

I looked this over and decided not to fill out the questionnaire because I don’t see how a ranking system could benefit a smaller and innovative program like mine . . . A ranking system would probably benefit a few large programs and hurt the rest of us. It would likely also hurt many large programs who can’t all be in the top five.

Still others, echoing objections to rankings overall, suggested that it is impossible to mathematically assess a journalism program’s worth. “With all due respect this is the worst idea I’ve heard in a long time,” wrote an administrator from a university in the Southeast in a personal email:

A big concern regarding these ratings is that there’s no way to develop the perfect algorithm to accommodate all the variables in a journalism education. Even more problematic is that these rankings can only measure inputs (i.e., selectivity, productivity of faculty, contact with alumni—need big budgets for that) and have no viable way of measuring output or throughput. So the schools with the big endowments to pay for better students and more research-oriented faculty (input) will always come out on top, just like they do in these other polls.

Respondents from larger vs. smaller schools

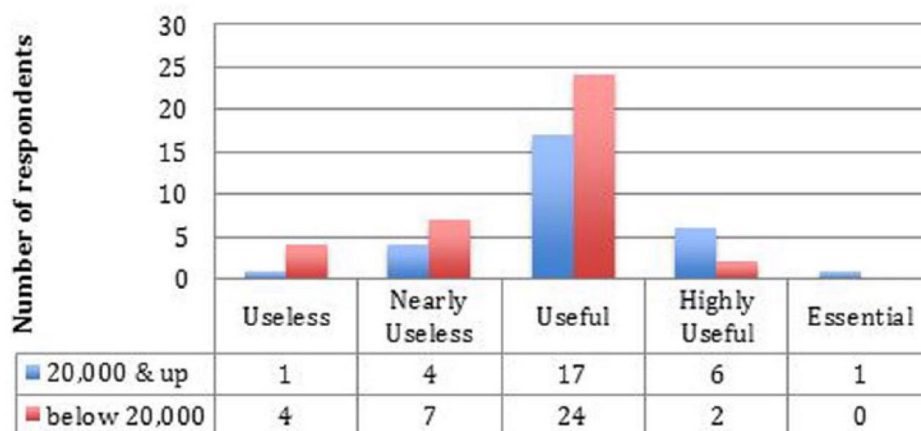


Figure 3. Numbers of respondents answering the question in Figure 1, above, broken down by institutional size. The figures 20,000 and below 20,000 refer to institution-wide enrollment. Tally excludes three respondents who did not name themselves or their schools.

Sentiment for or against ranking varies slightly by the size of the institution with which respondents were affiliated. At larger schools (with enrollment of 20,000 and above), 24 respondents out of 29 (or 83%) judged the idea of ranking *useful*, *highly useful*, or *essential*, with most falling into the *useful* group. At smaller schools (below 20,000 in enrollment), 26 out of 37 respondents (70%) made similar judgments. So, although support overall was substantial, the inclination to find ranking *nearly useless* or *useless* was slightly higher in smaller schools. Results appear in Figure 3.

This difference may reflect the idea—suggested by the administrator at a smaller Midwestern school—that rankings would tend to benefit larger schools that may have more resources and personnel to offer deeper or more varied programs. One way to mitigate, although not eliminate, this concern would be to develop a ranking system that groups programs by size and compares them with peers of similar sizes. All programs could still earn overall rankings, but in addition, subcategories could be developed by size to assure “apples to apples” comparisons.

Furthermore, the stances respondents took on ranking may also have been affected by whether they were affiliated with programs accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Out of 35 respondents associated with accredited programs who answered the question, 29—or 83%—said they would find ranking *useful*, *highly useful*, or *essential*. Among 31 respondents associated with non-accredited programs, 21—or 68%—rendered

Respondents from accredited vs. non-accredited programs

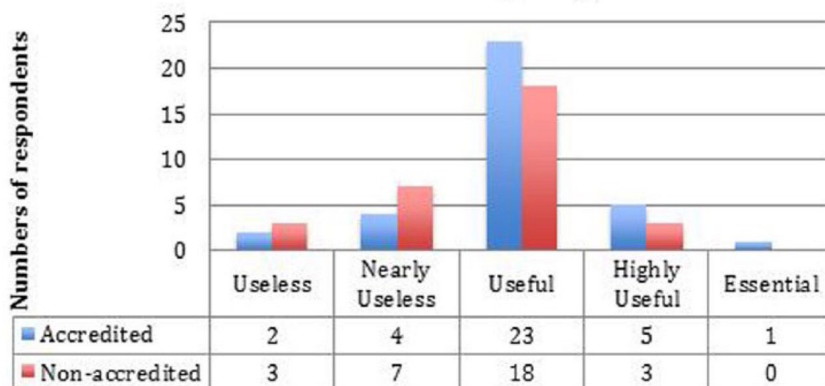


Figure 4. Numbers of respondents answering the question in Figure 1, above, broken down by those from institutions accredited by ACEJMC and those associated with schools not accredited by the group. ACEJMC = Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

similar judgments. In other words, although less than one fifth of those from accredited programs found the idea *nearly useless* or *useless*, nearly one third of the respondents from non-accredited institutions rendered similar negative views. Results appear in Figure 4:

Impassioned as the comments by objectors were, they were outnumbered in the survey results by those favoring the idea of rankings. The majority may have sided with arguments for such a ranking that were advanced in the *Educator* essay, which was cited in the cover letter to the survey. The essay held that rankings could help students find programs that would be most worthwhile, based on certain objective measures, and argued that competition to place higher in a comparative list would spur improvements. By providing clear standards for success and assessing programs accordingly, the ranking would help faculty and administrators better focus on making their programs better. Finally, a ranking would provide a vehicle for faculty and administrators to see what sorts of regimens competing programs offer, providing that all are noted.

The idea for such a ranking, moreover, comes at a time when comparative statistical evaluations of universities and colleges are moving beyond magazine and newspaper lists and into government policy. Alarmed by rising school costs, the U.S. Department of Education in 2013 laid out plans to rate schools based on their cost-effectiveness. The system would help the government offer more federal student aid to schools that rate higher. Such a rating system would have involved assessing a mix of objective measures, an approach then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan defended in remarks at a TIME Summit on Higher Education on September 20, 2013:

... I absolutely reject the idea that it is impossible to create a meaningful college ratings system for students and families. I reject the idea that the value of a college education is so elusive, so inexpressible that no ratings system can ever meaningfully help consumers determine its value. (Duncan, 2013)

The Department of Education in late 2014 announced that it was considering three rating levels, listing schools as “high-performing,” “low-performing,” and “in the middle.” The department planned to use metrics that assess the schools based on access (such as the percentage of students receiving Pell grants), affordability (such as average tuition, scholarships, and loan debt), and outcomes (such as graduation and transfer rates, graduate earnings, and advanced degrees earned by graduates). The department said it received many comments calling for simplicity and focus in the rating scheme and urging it to avoid numerical rankings and “false precision.” Its goal, it said, was to “highlight significant success and weakness.”

The Department of Education’s plans, which it intended to implement in the 2015-2016 academic year, provoked an angry response from academic leaders who decried the idea of evaluating schools through such statistical means. Carol Geary Schneider, head of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, told the *Wall Street Journal* the ratings framework would be misleading. It would focus on access, affordability, and outcomes, but not on academic quality, she said. Schneider added:

The public will assume a college-ratings system is telling them something about quality, and in fact, by design, the metrics will tell you something about affordability; something about low-income students attending this institution; and something about employment prospects afterwards. Period. (Belkin, 2014)

After a vigorous lobbying effort against the ratings scheme by groups such as the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU; Colarusso & Marcus, 2014), the department scrapped the ratings proposal in 2015 (Belkin & Korn, 2015). Instead, it revised a “College Scorecard” website to provide data students and their families could use to make their own comparisons of schools. The revisions include measures of students’ earnings 6 and 10 years after they started attending (Blumenstyk, 2015). Soon, however, private publishers such as *The Economist* began using data in the Scorecard to enhance their rankings (Chingos & Blagg, 2015).

Part of the problem in all ranking schemes, one critic suggested, is that such systems seek to evaluate schools irrespective of their widely varying missions. A small liberal arts college, the argument goes, has different goals in educating its students than a large public university does. Both might have different goals than programs geared toward training students for certain professions, such as law or medicine. “You just cannot compare [the broad variety of schools] coherently,” Bates College President Clayton Spencer told the *Wall Street Journal*. “You need to compare them in a mission-specific way” (Belkin, 2014).

Such a “mission-specific” approach would be the aim of ranking journalism and mass communications programs, the *Educator* essay and the survey suggested.

Unlike broadly focused liberal arts programs, journalism and mass communications programs are designed to train students in specific skills and intellectual approaches that are useful in a variety of professional fields. Because of their tight focus, such programs lend themselves more readily to comparative qualitative and quantitative measurements in much the same way that business and other professional schools do. (Admittedly, journalism and mass communications program may blend liberal arts studies and professional education, but they still lend themselves to comparisons appropriate to professional schools.)

If one wanted to create a ranking to better compare schools or programs, in theory, one merely needs answers to the right set of questions. The more detailed the approach, the more specific the comparisons. Moreover, with more detailed data, one could move beyond broad categories contemplated by the Department of Education approach and develop a top-to-bottom numerical ranking. Efforts to do so thus far, by groups unaffiliated with journalism programs, have been incomplete at best. The cover sheet on the survey noted, “Attempts to build top 50 lists and similar rankings of such programs have been sporadic and reputational, more resembling beauty pageants than serious comparative analyses” (see Appendix).

The Most Useful Criteria

Respondents to the survey were asked to assess the value of various criteria that could be combined to develop a ranking. Some prospective criteria tested in the survey were drawn from those used in various ranking schemes; other criteria were developed from practices some schools already use to evaluate their results in educating students. For instance, alumni surveys are commonly used in ranking business schools and would likely be helpful in ranking journalism and mass communications programs, as well. More specific to journalism and mass communications programs, many such programs now urge their students to compete in various national contests, which the programs use to burnish their reputations and offer an idea of where they stand compared with peer institutions. Such contests offer a basis for comparison between programs. As another example, the experience and training levels of faculty might offer a useful basis for comparison.

Between 68 and 71 respondents answered questions concerning the potential criteria, assessing each proposed measure on a scale of *useless*, *nearly useless*, *useful*, *highly useful*, and *essential*. The criteria were then ranked according to the percentage of positive responses—that is, how many judged each criterion as *useful*, *highly useful*, or *essential*. The criteria are ranked in Table 1.

Some of the suggested criteria would require programs to survey their alumni regularly to gather information on their career and pay status and their satisfaction levels with their education as they look back on the academic experience. Although this would require substantial effort, the exercise would provide useful information to assess a program’s success. Furthermore, many programs have found it helpful to maintain relationships with alumni for fundraising and networking for internships and employment opportunities. In itself, the existence of a robust alumni-relations program might be a criterion on which to evaluate programs.

Table 1. Potential Criteria for Assessing Programs, Ranked by Support Among Respondents

First Tier Responses^a

- 1. Variety of media production outlets available to showcase student work, including student newspaper, magazine, radio station, and access on campus or off to TV outlets
- 2. Number of students in media internship programs over the prior 3 years
- 3. Variety of academic programs offered
- 4. Depth of industry experience among full-time faculty
- 5. Percentage of alumni who found work related to their fields of study within a year of graduating
- 6. Number of faculty members with doctoral degrees
- 7. Depth of industry experience among adjunct faculty members
- 8. Levels of satisfaction with the academic program among alumni at least 5 years after graduation
- 9. Specialized academic offerings such as business and sports journalism, data-based journalism, magazine writing and production, mobile media, photography, and video production
- 10. Number of tenured faculty members as a percentage of full-time faculty

Second Tier Responses^b

- 11. Number of adjunct or other part-time faculty as a percentage of faculty
- 12. Current full-time undergraduate enrollment in various academic areas
- 13. Number of faculty members seeking tenure, as a percentage of full-time faculty
- 14. Number of non-tenured full-time faculty members, as a percentage of full-time faculty
- 15. Current annual tuition
- 16. Number of faculty who have created documentaries
- 17. Number of faculty who have written books
- 18. Number of refereed journal articles published by faculty in prior 3 years
- 19. Percentage of alumni who went on to graduate school in any field
- 20. Annual pay levels of alumni 2 years after graduation

Third Tier Responses^c

- 21. Annual pay levels of alumni 5 years after graduation
- 22. Number of external peer-reviewed presentations by faculty in prior 3 years
- 23. Current graduate student enrollment in various academic areas
- 24. Current annual budget
- 25. Number of National Student Advertising Competition top 10 national finishes in prior 3 years
- 26. Full-time undergraduate enrollment in various areas 5 years before the current year
- 27. Annual pay levels of alumni 10 years or more after graduation
- 28. Number of student American Advertising Federation (ADDY) award Best of Show and Judges Choice winners in the prior 3 years
- 29. Number of Hearst Journalism Awards top 10 finishers in the prior 3 years
- 30. Dollar total of grants obtained by faculty in the current academic year
- 31. Annual budget 5 years before the current year
- 32. Number of College Photographer of the Year Gold Award winners in prior 3 years
- 33. Estimated number of living alumni
- 34. Graduate student enrollment in various areas 5 years before the current year

-
- a. Responses in this tier were judged positively by between 78.9% and 94.3% of those responding.
 - b. Responses in this tier were judged positively by between 68.6% and 76.5% of those responding.
 - c. Responses in this tier were judged positively by between 50.7% and 68.1% of those responding.

Discussion of the Criteria

Irrespective of their standings in this survey, several of the potential criteria properly should be grouped and considered together. For instance, enrollment of both undergraduate and graduate students in the current year and 5 years earlier should be considered together to determine whether programs are growing or staying even, which could be considered a positive, or shrinking. (Some programs, of course, may think it useful to stay at the same size, but few want to shrink.) Similarly, budget levels of programs measured in the current year and compared with 5 years earlier would be considered together as measures of health.

Furthermore, raw numbers of faculty and enrollments would allow for programs to be grouped. Smaller programs could then be compared with programs of similar sizes, as well as compared with larger programs. Any ranking system should take into account the program sizes. For instance, one might want to weight such raw measures as the number of faculty members who have published books by adjusting that for the size of the program's student body and faculty. (A 3,000-student program in which 10 of 40 faculty members have written books might deserve less credit than a 1,000-student program in which 10 of 20 faculty members have done the same. The ratios suggest higher quality, at least by this barometer, in the smaller program). Graduate programs, moreover, would be compared with graduate programs, while undergraduate programs would be compared with undergraduate programs. Along with a top to bottom ranking, programs could be appropriately grouped to assure fair comparisons.

It is curious that most respondents thought evaluating programs by the performance of their students in national competitions, such as the Hearst and ADDY contests, would be less important than other criteria. The awards criteria, moreover, generated several critical comments. "Awards are sketchy indicators, in my mind," one commenter said, reacting to a proposed criterion for the number of College Photographer of the Year Golden Award Winners for the prior 3 years. Another, reacting to a proposed criterion dealing with American Advertising Federation ADDY awards, complained, "ADDYs cost money and good students don't necessarily have the money to enter."

Some respondents, however, suggested including more student award competition results. Reacting to the proposed criterion dealing with National Student Advertising Competition award winners, one commenter said, "How about Effy awards, Pencils, Silver Bullets? Again why limit award categories?" Another said, "Top 10 national is very hard to do and a three year time frame way too short. Regional would be a better barometer." In public relations, one commenter suggested adding Bateman Case Study Competition awards from the Public Relations Student Society of America, PRWeek awards, and recognition by the Public Relations Society of America.

Some commenters took umbrage at the proposed Hearst Awards criterion, which would compare programs based on the number of top 10 finishers in the prior 3 years. "This mostly would help differentiate quality in larger programs," one respondent said. Another complained, "Some schools teach to the Hearst contest—misleading." A third said, "BEA, SPJ, Online news association awards. Why limit

to Hearst?” (It should be noted that the Hearst competition is open only to ACEJMC-accredited domestic programs.)

Finally, the question of insuring that enough programs take part in a ranking scheme to make it meaningful is challenging. Schools choose to cooperate or not with *U.S. News & World Report* and other ranking organizations, and such organizations are forced to ferret out publicly available data to fill in gaps when schools refuse to provide information. One means of insuring cooperation by journalism and mass communications programs is to make it a condition of ACEJMC accreditation that programs provide needed information. But most respondents—50 out of 67 who answered the question—opposed the idea of making it mandatory for accredited programs to gather and furnish the needed information. “Absolutely not. It would be a burden,” one commenter said. Another added, “I’m not in favor of ‘mandatory’ surveys. As an administrator, I already have more paperwork than I have time to complete.”

Conclusion

Results of this survey suggest that among those who responded, there is considerable support for the idea of ranking journalism and mass communications programs. The few impassioned comments from critics of the idea suggest, too, that there might be a good deal of hostility to it. This is not surprising, in light of the criticisms that have long been leveled against rankings in popular media, even as students and their parents study them and university officials often publicize their school standings for marketing reasons.

The purpose of ranking journalism and mass communications programs would not be marketing, even if schools understandably sought to use such a list in that way. Instead, as laid out in the essay in the *Educator* in March 2014, the purpose would be to spur competition among faculty and programs to put in place the practices and offerings that best serve students and the professions the students prepare for. Unlike the professional media world, where competition for audiences and revenues drives improvements, the drivers of improvement in the academic world are less tangible. A ranking would provide much-needed tangibility. Moreover, it could be a vehicle by which faculty and administrators can learn of best practices to seek to adopt them. Too often now, communication about such best practices is poor or nonexistent.

Such a ranking would provide more useful information than a rating system, such as that contemplated by the Department of Education. The problem with the federal approach is that schools would have been grouped into a few “buckets” with no distinctions among them. If there were, for instance, 50 schools that were judged “high-performing” and another 50 judged “in the middle,” one could see distinctions between the groups, but not between individual schools or programs in each group. Such a rating would provide incomplete information at best. Blurring distinctions among schools might make the effort more palatable to critics and thus politically tolerable, but would ill serve students, parents, faculty, and other interested parties. A numerical ranking, with clear explanations, would crystallize the distinctions among journalism and mass communications programs.

The essay called on the AEJMC to take the lead in establishing a ranking system, including spelling out criteria to be applied. Furthermore, it suggested that programs be required to take part, as a condition of accreditation by the ACEJMC, although nonaccredited programs could voluntarily take part, as well. (Already, some accredited programs hold themselves out as superior to non-accredited neighbors, suggesting accreditation is a badge of quality, an informal tiering of sorts. Opening this comprehensive and detailing ranking to all comers would test that idea.)

Most survey respondents, however, opposed requiring participation in this proposed ranking, even as they favored the idea of rankings. Voluntary compliance might yield considerable participation, but one must wonder if programs would go to the trouble of conducting alumni surveys and gathering other needed information without being required to do so (no matter how worthwhile such efforts might be). The risk of voluntary participation is that one could be left with incomplete information and too few participants to make the ranking worthwhile. Of course, if enough programs did take part in a ranking scheme, those who refuse risk facing uncomfortable questions from their alumni, from top administrators, and from prospective students. A successful ranking scheme might tend to draw reluctant programs in over time.

The survey, the results of which are reported here, could begin a process that would lead to useful rankings. More research would be needed to finalize criteria, to determine whether certain criteria ought to be weighted more heavily than others in computing rankings, and to determine how best to report the rankings so they treat programs of all sizes fairly. Programs could be categorized based on the size of institution of which they are part (perhaps allowing for comparisons among small schools of fewer than 5,000 students, medium-sized schools of between 5,000 and 15,000, and larger schools above 15,000, for instance).³ Even further refinements might be appropriate, allowing rankers to group the journalism and mass communications programs by their program enrollment sizes, for example, as well as by the enrollments of the parent institutions.

The goal, of course, would be to assure that appropriate comparisons are made and a fair ranking developed. Furthermore, all interested parties should see all the factors used in determining rankings. Programs all have different strengths and may focus on different areas; for example, some might emphasize writing while others stress broadcasting. A ranking system, with full and clear explanation, could make clear the areas in which programs shine, as well as those where they might want to improve.

Acceptance of the idea by the preponderance of respondents suggests that more detailed investigations would be useful. The essay calling on the AEJMC to take the lead in establishing a ranking system suggested that a committee representing a cross-section of programs could advance the concept and hammer out an appropriate ranking system. Such a committee might find the criteria enumerated here and endorsed by a fair number of respondents to be a helpful starting point.

Appendix

SurveyMonkey Poll Cover Letter^a

Colleagues,

Rankings of universities and professional schools are popular, albeit controversial. They may play a role in how some students and parents choose programs to attend. They may be especially important for students considering professional graduate programs, such as law, medicine, engineering and business.

Yet journalism and communications programs have been largely omitted from such rankings. Attempts to build top 50 lists and similar rankings of such programs have been sporadic and reputational, more resembling beauty pageants than serious comparative analyses. And yet, the need for the comparative analysis that a well-done ranking would provide may never have been greater, given the changes the journalism, advertising and public relations arenas are undergoing.

This paradox is discussed in an essay in the spring 2014 edition of *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. The piece, "Let Us Rank Journalism Programs," is available at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/journalismfacpub/80/>.

As the essay suggests, such rankings could be useful to students and parents, as well as to faculty and administrators who would like to see how their programs stack up against others. Indeed, if such a ranking were done periodically, it could help drive improvements in programs as faculty and administrators seek to emulate or surpass peers. Of course, this assumes that the criteria are appropriate and fully disclosed.

Developing criteria that could be used to craft a ranking of programs makes for a fascinating challenge. This survey is an attempt to determine what criteria might be useful for such a ranking.

Please provide the identifying information and then review each proposed criterion below and offer a view, by using the 1-5 scale, on the usefulness of the question. (You need not answer the criteria questions, just assess their value.) You may find some criteria essential and judge others useless, while still others may fall in between for you. This survey is designed to gauge sentiment about which criteria would be the most valuable and those that would be least helpful.

Some questions here are simply informational, seeking descriptions of the size and cost of programs. Others would reflect the quality of these programs. Both types, of course, would be necessary to put programs into appropriate groups and to assess them accordingly. I expect to publish the results of this survey.

Please review each question and offer your opinion, by checking the appropriate measure on the scale of "useless" to "essential." Offer comments, too, if you believe those would be helpful. And kindly answer the opinion questions at the end. Please complete this survey by May 15, 2014. Feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

Best,

Joseph Weber, Associate Professor
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a. Although responses were requested by May 15, 2014, four complete responses were received afterward, by May 28, 2014, and were accepted.

Declarations — The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to and received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Respondents who completed the survey were associated with the following schools: Abilene Christian University, Ball State University, Baylor University, Bowling Green State University, Brigham Young University, Buffalo State (SUNY), Cabrini College, California State University, Chico, Colorado State University, DePaul University, DePauw University, East Carolina University, Elon University, Florida A&M University, Georgia State University, Hood College, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Iowa State University, Ithaca College, Keene State College, Lindenwood University, Louisiana State University, Madonna University, Mercer University, Michigan State University, Murray State University, New York University, North Dakota State University, Otterbein University, Palm Beach Atlantic University, Samford University, San Diego State University, San Jose State University, Savannah State University, South Dakota State University, Southeast Missouri State University, Stephen F. Austin State University, Suffolk University, Syracuse University, Taylor University, Temple University, Texas Christian University, Texas Tech University, Trinity University, University of Arizona, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Denver, University of Georgia, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, University of Iowa, University of Kentucky, University of Memphis, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Southern California, University of South Carolina, University of New Mexico, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, University of Northern Iowa, University of North Texas, University of St. Francis, Walla Walla University, Washington and Lee University, Weber State University, West Texas A&M University, and Wichita State University.
2. There were 105 responses to the survey request, though those disqualified from the tally discussed in this article were incomplete (entirely blank in many cases, suggesting viewers were simply curious) or duplicative. Some respondents also reported technical difficulties in answering questions, but they could have surmounted those difficulties by changing browsers, as potential respondents were advised. Some respondents did so.
3. The groupings of less than 5,000, between 5,000 and 15,000, and above 15,000 are used by COLLEGEdata.com, an online advisory service for prospective students. The service notes that a label of “huge” could be applied to universities with more than 30,000 students.

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